INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

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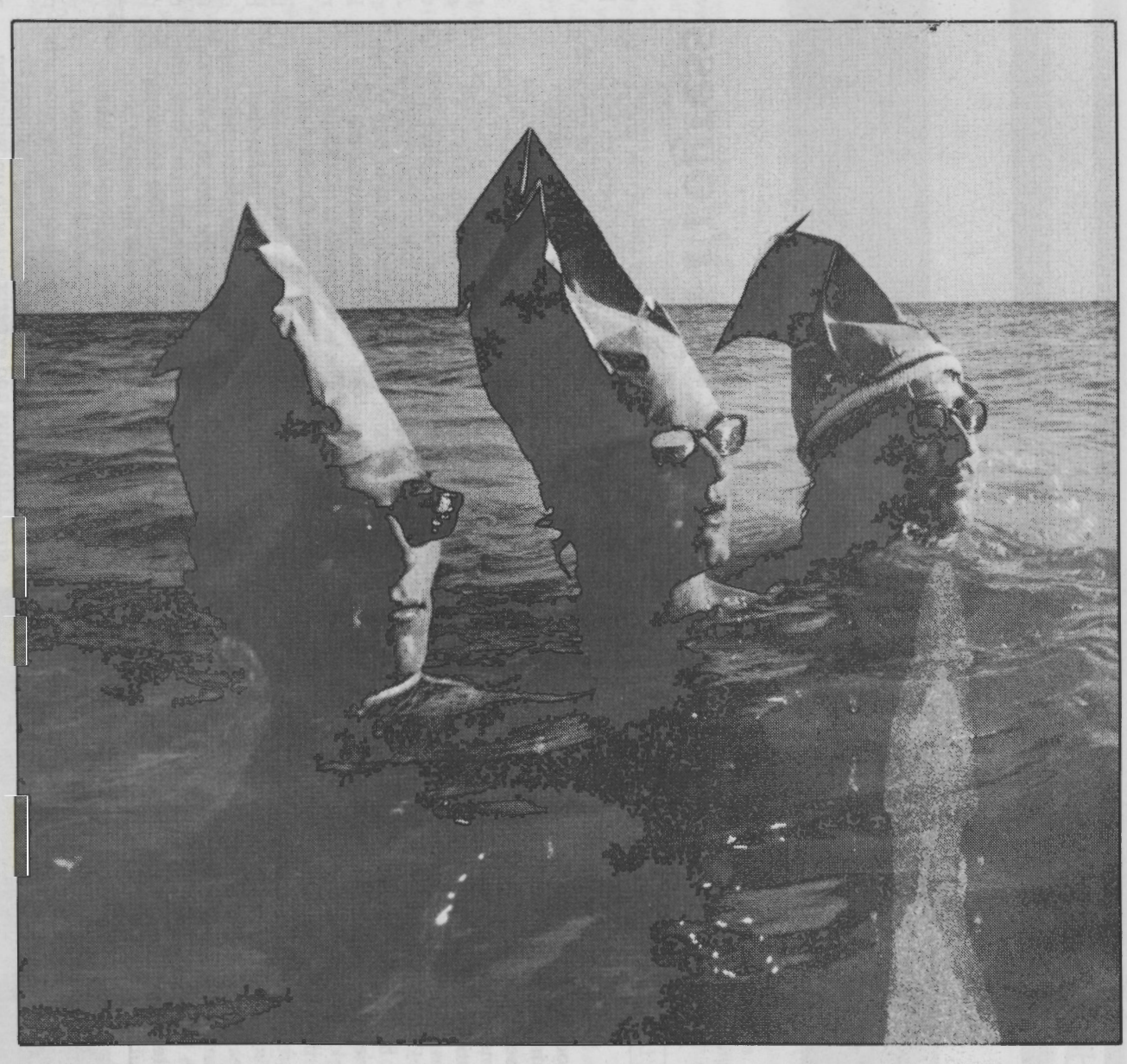

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Chinsegut Film/Video Conference In Retrospect

Bob Gilbert

In 1977, Chinsegut presented Lenny Lipton and his Super-8 3-D System. (photo by Nancy Yasecko)

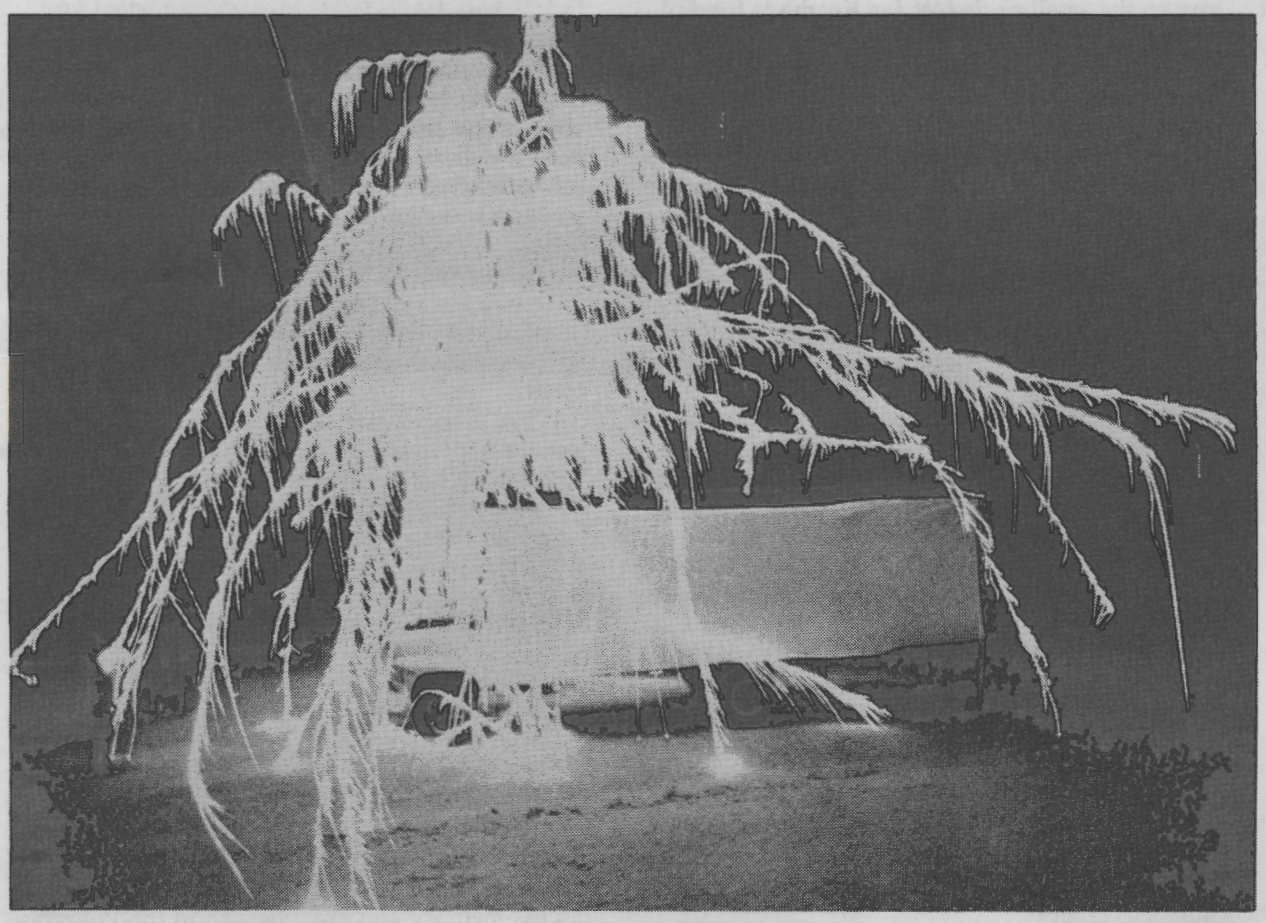
The Chinsegut Conference, described since its beginnings in 1976 as a "congenial gathering of film and video artists," grew out of the efforts of the film faculty and students in the Art Department of the University of South Florida.

Featuring a non-competitive atmosphere, with no categories, no awards and miniscule remuneration for the invited guests, the conference has traditionally been held in the Spring, depending heavily on a benign climate to lure filmmakers South.

The programming and general conference structure was initially designed to provide a common ground where regional film artists could mix and match with more established artists, and with curators, critics and programmers. The intent was to provide more exposure for Southern artists and to connect with other areas of independent activity.

The absence of competitions and awards was based on the perception of a few basic realities: money not used for awards could be spent on transportation to bring more people to the conference, and since the criteria for excellence in this field is difficult to establish, the behavior of judges is frequently erratic and more susceptible to the aesthetic equivalent of small town politics.

More importantly, the feeling of the Tampa area filmmakers at that time was that of laboring in an isolated backwater, unsung and unsupported by the granting agencies; that winners require losers, and that since as a whole, the independent, personal, experimental, Avant-Garde media artists had captured probably less than a one percent "market share," it was important to avoid the kind of situation described so well by Bob Dylan, "A lot of people don't have much food on the table, but they got a lot of knives and forks...and they got to cut something." In other words, the purpose of the conference was to establish connections, not credentials.



Fireworks burst over Louis Hock's 30-foot projection screen adapted for his multiple projection of a continuous loop threaded through three projectors, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. (photo by David Audet)

Since that first gathering in 1976, the funding situation has improved and a number of small grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Florida Fine Arts Council, and, in the past, the Art Department of the University of South Florida, have been instrumental in enabling Chinsegut to continue.

More than any other single person, Charles Lyman has been responsible for the continuation and continuity of the conference, although in recent years the work of directing, administrating and "making it happen" has passed among a loose coalition of conference veterans -- Stan Kozma, David Audet, Peter Melaragno and Bill Lawler, among others.

It was Lyman's interest in unconventional screening situations, partly a result of his academic background in Design and Architecture, which led to the installations, performances and events which have been featured over the years.

These extra-filmic events have always exhibited a wide variety of form and intent, from the technological glossolalia of multiple image sources projecting onto any material that reflects, refracts or diffuses, to the carefully composed internal reference systems of performance art. The free-play and visual experimentation of the former activity (tracing its history from the Sixties light shows on one hand and John Cage on the other) opens a variety of experiences, creating a sort of media buffet. Its major drawback is that it tends towards an "all you can eat" treatment of imagery; (everyone remembers the improvised mutant form created by Lenny Lipton's 3-D Super-8 system and Stan Vanderbeek's "steam screen" in 1977, but no one can recall the images).

ON THE COVER: A spontaneous aquatic moment at Chinsegut Film/Video Conference 1983, N. Redington Beach, Florida. (photo by David Audet)

A congenial gathering of film/video artists at the Chinsegut Estate in 1979. (photo by Nancy Yasecko)

The major virtue of this media buffet is that it has created a menu, a list of possibilities that has been drawn from for more selective use in the expressionist and thematically grounded work of performance artists. Julia Hayward as "Duka Delight" was the first to introduce Chinsegut to this new wave opera. Orchestrating films and audio tracks, singing, reading by the reflected light of the screen, playing a Tibetan drum, she composed a cluster of references forming her autobiography as the daughter of a Baptist Minister.

When Chinsegut moved from the University's ante-bellum retreat of the same name to the Tides Beach and Bath Club (a survivor from the "Moderne" era of coastal resorts serving a clientele of similar extraction) many of the events began to acquire an aquatic air: underwater projections with goggles supplied for the enthusiastic viewer, dancers entering backstage by swimming in from the Gulf of Mexico. Indeed, with its patios, pools, piano bar and palm trees growing through the bathroom roof, the Tides itself is a sort of on-going performance/installation.

This year, on some picture windows across the courtyard from the geriatric Jazz trio, Charles Recher ran two separate but similar loops, each one a play on the idea of looping. The first piece, with genre echoes reaching back to Porter's *Great Train Robbery*, was Recher's version of that archetypal image known to us all as "Dance, Mister". But in this short-circuited variation, the cowboy was shooting at his own feet. In the second loop a schizoid character addresses the camera and coaxes the audience closer, then, with the abruptness of a splice, demands they keep away. The phrases alternate with the cyclical determinism of the loop, advancing and receding simultaneously.

Window Lights, installed in a wide passageway leading to the beach, is a culmination of Charles Lyman's experiments with the relationship between literal (architectural) and representational space. Cross references are established by using a set of venetian blinds as a screen. As the blinds are opened the projected images pass through to a dancer and a second screen, a three-dimensional box-like construction with the sides slanting outward in forced perspective. Shots from darkened rooms looking through windows onto open space and compositions with deep perspective (a highway, a pier) are held on the first screen, allowed to pass completely through to the second, or, with the blinds partially drawn, seen on both screens and the dancer in the space between them. Throughout, the dancer attempts to "place" herself within the various spaces of the image.

Mitchell Kriegman performed as the tragic comic "Marshall Klugman" in a series of videotape equivalents to the one-liners of a stand-up comedian. Many of these concern Marshall's adjustments to bizarre maladies (*Man Without a Mouth, The Weightless Boy*); some use other characters (the auto-kinetic victim of disco music in *The Dancing Man*, a complacent pet in *The Effect of Gravity on Dogs*). But his major effort is *My Neighborhood*, in which a character suffering extreme delusions of reference leads a homey and familial tour through a hostile, urban environment.

The absence of any strict definitions of performance at Chinsegut has left the category without limits, open not only to the contemporary expressionism of Alyson Pou's *Dwelling With The Strong Eye* but also to jugglers, sword swallowers and contortionists, as well as the more traditional actors, dancers and musicians. Due to the Chinsegut "All Skate" policy, the events span the globe from high art to Ted Mack, from the thrill of victory to the smell of de feet (as Kozma is fond of saying).

The professional competence of Pleiades Modern Dance Company compared favorably with the naive allegory of the Arthur Brown Troupe, with its sweating nubians, flaming torches and blondes in loincloths in the limbo setting of the beach. It might well have been subtitled "Dawn of the Dominatrix."

The Capra Dance Company also made use of the beach as primeval setting, wading in from the Gulf to enact their own creation mythology in the end forming a Pilobolean organism and returning to the sea.

Stewart Lippe, a.k.a. Lippe Franzini, the head of the Franzini Family Circus and currently at work on a film history of vaudeville, juggled machetes from an extended unicycle, performed his impression of a helicopter on fire, and executed other feats of kinetic daring-do in a testimonial to the boundless career options available to those holding degrees in film.

Dr. Zog kept the audience on the edge of their gag reflex with his sword swallower. The No-Nonsense Company, a theatre group, played to a sympathetic audience with their talk show caricature of film critics.

Mary Ellen Brown, in an unusually restrained piece, constructed a complete parlor setting to serve as a context for a small television monitor framing video "photographs" of models in semi-static Victorian poses.

The inclusion this year of a number of documentary films was a marked departure from the programming of the past which had concentrated primarily on short, experimental films. Years ago, when the first feature-length documentary was shown, it cleared the hall; even the projectionist wandered off, leaving the tail leader of the first reel flapping at an empty screen.

The documentaries screened this year were received much more favorably, with Les Blank's *Burden of Dreams* playing to a full house. This film, which could serve as the third installment of the *Heart of Darkness* trilogy (after *Apocalypse Now*), chronicles the seemingly endless series of defeats and disasters suffered by Werner Herzog at an isolated location in the middle of the Peruvian rain forest as he struggles to finish the filming of *Fitzcarraldo*. Near the end of the documentary, in an advanced state of that madness known to all filmmakers who have ever been crushed beneath the weight of their own aspirations, Herzog rages eloquently against the jungle, that "obscenity of growth", saying "even the stars here are a mess".

The fruits of one man's dreams and labor form the text for Gayla Jamison's *Enough to Share: A Portrait of Koinonia Farms*. The film uses a straight-forward documentary approach to show the social structure and operations of an inter-racial Christian commune founded in rural Georgia in the mid-forties by Clarence Jorden.

In *Possum O'Possum* by Greg Killmaster, deadpan documentary treatment allows the residents of a small Alabama town to spin out a phoney cosmology of tall tales placing that animal at the very center of their culture.

Down on South Beach by Mel Kiser and Corky Irick is a personal treatment of the past romance and endangered present of the aging citizens and Deco architecture of this historic community on South Miami Beach. Also concerned with the preservation of the South Beach area is *Art Deco*, by Atlantic Productions. This film sets up the preservation attempts with an extended montage of archival footage which traces the development of the streamlined Deco aesthetic through the trains, planes, hats and hairstyles of the thirties.

A significant feature of many of the films screened as documentaries was the way in which they strayed from the conventions of documentary technique. Tony Buba has made a number of films about his friends and relatives living in an economically burnt-out mill town in Pennsylvania. In *Washing Walls With Mrs. G.*, a locked-off camera shows the filmmaker at work washing the kitchen walls under the supervision of his grandmother. As her monologue reveals the "new world" view of the aging Italian immigrant, Tony smuggles out his own commentary in the form of printed sub-titles. *Mill Hunk Herald* starts as a documentary but turns into a surreal vision of mill town culture. It begins in a blue collar bar interviewing the publishers of a workers' paper and ends with the entire bar following an accordionist playing "Jumpin Jack Flash" out into the street where they are joined by the local high school band and flag corps.

While it uses some straight documentary techniques, Greer Grant's *Portrait of a Poet* is also inflected by her earlier introspective works, frequently shifting into her own visual interpretations of the key poem "Foam on Gulf Shores."

With a continously mobile wide-angle lens and an unblimped camera, Scott Sroka filmed a rough-sync sketch of his neighbor, an old woman filling her sunset years with the creation of pine cone poodles and other bizarre craft items.

The screening of so many documentaries this year cast a different light on some of the personal works shown, illuminating a documentary aspect usually overlooked. Ted Lyman's *FLA-ME* uses footage shot over a period of years during his vacations in Florida and Maine. In conversations/interviews he and his young daughter discuss memory and documentation (photographs, journals) and the influence they have on each other. With a child's wisdom she prefers memory,

since you can't always have a camera or journal with you, "but you always have your mind close at hand."

With the thoroughness of an anthropologist, and using the same technique of analysing the common daily practices of a culture to reveal its depths, Roberta Cantow concentrates exclusively on images of drying laundry in *Clotheslines*. Using voice-over gathered from a number of women, this cultural artifact is seen as a symbol of oppression, as a language system, and as the glue that binds a sisterhood of housewives.

Using extended shots of uncompromised real time and rigorously controlled framing, Peter Bundy's films (such as the recently completed *Four Corners*) employ the reductionist techniques of minimalist films to force the viewer back into the world of phenomena, of the objects and events where documentary films begin.

Although the majority of films shown at a gathering like Chinsegut will be blends or hybrid forms, the predominant characteristic of conventional documentaries, like narrative feature films, is the attempt to submerge your awareness of the medium, to create an invisible frame, like a trap door through which the viewer falls into the modes of experience and perception we hold in common and refer to with terms such as truth and reality; what Roland Barthes called a Readerly Text, a text which engulfs you and becomes truly environmental. In contrast to this is the predominate force at work in all the great variety of those films frequently referred to as experimental; this is the conscious and aggressive manipulation of the process through which the world is formalized into pictures; the selection and combination, the movements and framings, the edits, juxtapositions and overlays which are the result of the world transformed by media, that mediated world described by Barthes as the Writerly Text.

Due to the inherently referential nature of photography, it is still a window onto the shared world (or worlds) of experience, but a window which the filmmaker is obviously and energetically engaged in shaping, texturing and coloring.

In *Waiting*, Dan Curry uses the extended shutter opening of a still camera under low-light conditions to create a temporal net with large mesh. People who move through the frame are the ones who swim through the net; the image consists of those who stand still long enough to be exposed. In *Zones*, a man and a woman argue in voice-over, superimposing dramatic structure on an otherwise banal image. Curry uses quotations from Brecht and Barthes to direct our attention to the way narrative directs our perception, enabling us to select what is meaningful out of the ambiguous welter of possibilities in each image.

A 1983 Chinsegut sampling of guest artists, conference hosts, and participants. (photo by David Audet)

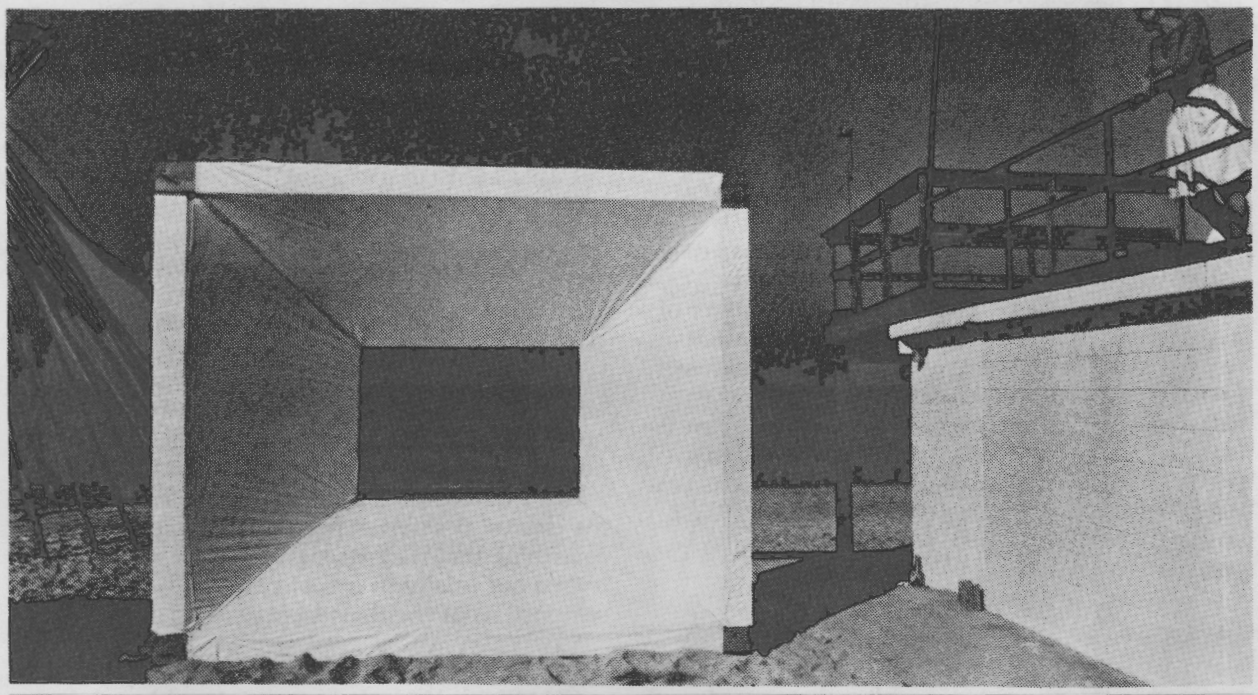
A picture is worth a thousand connotations, and a narrative text is one means of spotlighting the intended ones. Montage is another. In Lee Sokol's *Aqui Se Lo Halla, (Here You Will Find It)* shots from a bullfight, close-ups of sleight-of-hand coin tricks, a woman covering/revealing herself with a red scarf, and a man pacing and posturing before the camera are fused with associative links of rhythm, shape, and color. Through multiple recurrences these shots form a sort of non-linear pool whose surface tension supports a voice-over narrative of awakening desire.

Connotations litter the filmic landscape like confetti in another work by Scott Sroka which heaps images from all genres and styles into the same shake and bake bag. Westerns are intercut with talking heads that have the wrong audio sync'ed up and pieces of commercials collide randomly.

Found footage also forms the body of *Pop Pop Video*, a collection of tapes by Dara Birnbaum. In this case "found" means pulled directly from network broadcasts of prime time shows. By repeating characteristic scenes from *Wonder Woman* and *Kojak*, Birnbaum moves from familiarity to boredom to contempt in an attempt to distance the viewer from the weird and violent material that has come to be accepted as a norm.

Using the analytic ability of the optical printer to slow the action, repeat sequences and freeze frames, Nancy Yasecko's *Dancing Lessons* reveals the erotic content of a group of friends goofing for the camera.

Two films by Deanna Morse, the only animator at the conference this year, seem particularly emblematic of the work of the personal filmmaker. *Help! I'm Stranded...* is a classic in the artisanal mode of film production. Using the tools available, Deanna makes animated rubbings of the surfaces and objects within her reach in a motel room environment. Her film *Hand* consists of animated tracings of her outstretched hands. Like the Paleolithic imprints of the Lascaux caves, they serve as indexes of her presence and process. With these two films she outlines the characteristic profile of the personal filmmaker, working alone and with limited resources, producing works of personal significance.



A beach projection screen structure constructed for the presentation of Charles Lyman's film performance at Chinsegut 1983. (photo by David Audet)

Contemporary media artists, working in the modernist traditions of mainstream art rather than popular cinema, purchased their independence from commercial restraints at the cost of near total dependence on public institutions. Supported by the film departments of universities, funded by State and Federal granting agencies, and exhibited in festivals and museums sponsored by those institutions, they have existed in that half-light that an affluent society is willing to bestow on its private visionaries. As these institutions constrict and the monoliths of network television and the Hollywood film industry decentralize into the variations of cable programming, as the attention previously accorded by the art world to experimental film (in its ultimate formalization as the Structural film) is redirected towards performance art, new values come into play and new kinds of work are produced.

The value of a democratic forum like Chinsegut is that it allows these developments to be showcased as they occur, providing a periodic report on the state of the art. For information on the Chinsegut Film/Video Conference contact: Atlantic Productions, 813/932-5149.

Chinsegut 1983: A Discourse On Documentary Film

Edited by Nancy Yasecko

On May 7, 1983, in the Ballroom of the Tides Beach and Bath Club (the screening room for the 6th Chinsegut Film/Video Conference), Susan Leonard from the South Carolina Arts Commission Media Arts Center moderated a lively discussion among nine filmmakers on the topic of the documentary film.

What follows are excerpted passages from an audio tape of that event.

Left to right: Susan Leonard, Les Blank, Nancy Yasecko, Peter Bundy, Tony Buba, and Dan Curry. (photo by Bob Gilbert)

SUSAN: First, I would like to have everybody here tell, briefly, the kind of filmmaking that they've had experience with. Gayla?

GAYLA JAMISON: You saw my first film *(Enough To Share)* earlier, and that essentially is my experience with filmmaking. Although I feel like the work I did within the IMAGE Film/Video Center in Atlanta, talking to filmmakers constantly, had a lot to do with my being able to handle a film. (Gayla is former director of IMAGE Film/Video Center. Her recently completed first film *Enough To Share: A Portrait Of Koinonia Farms* is a documentary about a Christian commune in Georgia established in the 1940's.)

GREER GRANT: I recently completed a documentary on a poet and before that I was making more or less very short abstract films, and that is my up-to-date experience. (Greer is a Tampa independent filmmaker whose recent film *Portrait Of A Poet* is about James Locke.)

CHARLES LYMAN: I've been making documentary films for maybe 12 or 15 years now. I consider them just one part of my career and I'm very interested in other aspects of film. (Charles is co-founder of Chinsegut Film/Video Conference. He teaches film in the Art Department of the University of South Florida. An Atlantic Productions works-in-progress, *Art Deco*, was screened at Chinsegut.)

ROBERTA CANTOW: My films up until recently were mostly narrative and experimental narrative films, and I'm not sure that I even make documentary films but if I do I call them sort of experimental documentaries. (Roberta is an award-winning filmmaker living in New York whose film *Clotheslines* was screened at the Conference.)

LES BLANK: I've been making non-fiction films - I don't like the term "documentary" - independently since 1967. And then between '62 and '67 I free-lanced making what they call "industrial films" in advertising and education. Before that I wanted to make fiction films. And now I'm writing a script for a fiction film although it's not my ultimate ambition. I still like to make non-fiction films. Most of them are about music and regional culture and madmen. (Les is a Bay Area filmmaker who recently completed a film, *Burden Of Dreams*, on the making of Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*.)

NANCY YASECKO: I've made a number of short, experimental works, but I'm currently trying to finish a documentary and it's been an eye-opener...It's an hour long where most of my films have been 3 minutes, so that's a big step. It's told in the first person, so it's a little different than most documentaries. It regards the community where I grew up, Cocoa Beach, Florida, and is called *Growing Up With Rockets*. I relate stories about life there that include information about the space program and the group of technical people that lived there in that area. (Nancy is a South Carolina independent filmmaker.)

PETER BUNDY: I've been making films off and on for about 10 years. The films have a strong tendency toward actualities and real people and real places, and they also have a strong tendency to go to the personal world; so there's a kind of a paradox here. (Peter is a Minneapolis-based filmmaker and former instructor of film at Carlton College in Minnesota.)

DAN CURRY: All that you've seen here of my work is personal experimental film, but I also make informational documentaries on occasion so I can make those personal experimental films. And then I've made a few films that could be called documentaries, one in terms of a process, an artist's process, and another in the portrait genre. (Dan is currently an instructor of film at the University of Miami.)

TONY BUBA: I work mostly doing industrial video and on some low-budget horror films around Pittsburgh. And whenever I get some money together I make documentaries on where I live. (Over a period of years, Tony has produced a series of documentaries about his hometown Braddock, PA, a declining steel town, and the comic/tragic street personalities of its people.)

SUSAN: What I was interested in having people discuss to begin with is a point that Dan Curry brought up after Greer Grant showed her film, *Portrait Of A Poet*, the other day. Dan was questioning the idea of a documentary, the expectation that we have of it, and if it is in fact to be an information piece or if it's to be an interpretation. Can you talk a little bit about your role as documenter or interpreter of your material?

DAN: Maybe I should clarify what I said yesterday. I was questioning calling Greer's film a documentary. I was expecting a certain amount of information about this person, and I found that sections of the film were doing something different. I was asking you how that related to your definition of "documentary." For example, when the man read from his poetry, you were interpreting poetry. That I think is where my question was centered and focused. I guess I draw, in everything I do, real clear distinctions. Maybe that's an impediment to process.

GREER: Well, I'm sort of exactly the opposite and I don't categorize too much. I think that the way I look at all of life is that it's easy to be hemmed in by boundaries and I'm always seeing that the definitions I've been given, or that we've all been given, blur, and that it's one life going on anyway. So that's just a basic premise right there. And as far as the interpretation of the poem went, or it being a documentary, I think that if five different people do the same subject, it's all going to be different. It's all going to be subjective, and I felt that my chief role was actually to interpret the poem -- but I can see how that might bother somebody.

DAN: Gayla's film functions according to very clear conventions of documentary; direct address interviews, and they're all very well done. But it creates meaning through a system of conventions that aren't really ambiguous, that wouldn't be regarded as the kind of conventions of a personal film or another experimental film. I see film and images being put up on the screen, film and sound, and so forth, as being likened to a system that creates meaning...There are systems used to create the impression you are getting information in an objective way.

GREER: It seems like that's just a problem of syntax, when the point is whether or not you deliver what you felt your responsibility was to deliver. And in my case, I wanted to paint a well-rounded portrait of someone who writes poetry, and to me that justified and gave me the license to do with the imagery, as far as working it in with the words of the poem, in any way I saw fit.

CHARLES: I'm just going to remark that it seems clear you can't lump everything together under documentary or even films about realism. Because each film that's made has such different intentions, and there's quite a difference between *Art Deco* (which we saw earlier) and what Greer was trying to do. I think the time factor is very important, that your intentions as a documentarian or the net effect of the film changes tremendously as the film grows older. So that, for example, the early documentaries of somebody like John Grierson, which I think to the people who made them, were the clearest possible expression of the truth, something that they strongly felt was clear, have turned out finally in lots of cases to be a kind of self-portrait of the filmmaker...

PETER: Isn't that always true?

CHARLES: Yeah, I suppose it is, although I wonder in Les Blank's case where the thing is so untouched...

PETER: Oh, it isn't untouched at all. It's so carefully composed and so elegant...

DAN: It looks untouched because that's one of the conventions of documentary. He removes himself from the material. At the same time I agree with Peter, it's all very carefully laid out, and there are very interesting juxtapositions that go on there that slip by us, but are in point of fact, your statement about Herzog. But I think they get slipped by. Not slipped by. I mean, I hate to use that word as a magic trick. But it is. What do you think?

LES: I like being referred to as a magician because I think that's what film is. It's an illusionist work, that's what Herzog calls it. People get mad at me for not saying what my specific feelings are about Herzog. And it's too bad. I think the audience should be given more credit than they usually are given. They have sense and receptive ability and they can look at a film and make up their own mind. Just give them something to play with.

TONY: Well, I think you sense the camera in my films but I think it's invisible to the people that are there. I mean, they're used to it.

SUSAN: It's invisible to Sal?

TONY: Well, he performs for the camera. But I think everybody does. I mean the camera's there -- what's he going to do? But most of the people I know who I get interested in perform all the time anyway. I mean Sal's "on" 24 hours a day -- J. Roy is always "on" 24 hours -- everybody who hangs out on the street's "on" all the time. People ask me why didn't I go into Sal's house. Some of that stuff didn't even enter my mind, because that's his house, and I'm not going to go in his house or even ask him to go in his house.

DAN: So you're much more interested in people who perform anyway, right?

TONY: Right. What I do is think of a situation. Like if something will happen, then I'll try to build a whole film around one little incident, just some idea that hits me.

DAN: And you don't hide the technology. I mean I saw lights in-frame and the paraphenalia around it.

TONY: I like that, I mean when I work [commercially] that's what we do -- we hide the stuff so when I'm doing my own films I don't feel like hiding it. That's what you do on your job.

DAN: Well, okay. I guess I personally sense a different relationship between say, this filmmaker and his subjects and that filmmaker and his subjects. So take it away from Les Blank and Tony Buba -- I mean remove it from individuals. But I see a different relationship completely and you totally reconcile the problem. For some people you're too close; for some people they might argue you were directing the actors or what we were seeing wasn't truth. Does that even bother you?

TONY: No. I mean it's the way I see things, it's the way I interpret, it's the way I react to the people I know.

DAN: I guess some people would argue with you because documentaries are supposed to mean truth and faithfulness to something.

TONY: Well I don't know. I have a tough time with a lot of documentaries. I saw Willard Van Dyke's *Valley Town*. To me you do these things and it's supposed to do social change and you end up developing track housing in the fifties.

AUDIENCE (WADE BLACK): The tradition is that the documentary filmmaker needs to stand back out of the community, and yet I think that we're getting more and more where the community is producing its own images of itself. I think that's to a large degree what Tony's doing with his films. It's a very different tradition. It may be the name "documentary" is loose enough that it can encapsule all of that, but it's very different from what Grierson's intention was to begin with. I mean, he wasn't making a work from within the community and neither was Van Dyke. When Van Dyke was shooting in Huntsville, it wasn't because he was a Huntsville person who was making a record of that community. It was that he was coming down there to make a film about a river for the federal government [*The River*]. And I am not sure that that distance is something that you would want to have in Tony's films. I don't think the question of truth or non-truth is something that particularly bears on that as much as the question of inside and outside.

ROBERTA: It was Les who said that he had problems with the word "documentary" and to me that's at the core of everything we're talking about because when we say "documentary," whether we mean to or not, we seem to have certain expectations of what that word implies. That's when things like, is it true or invented, interpreted or informational, all those things come up and I don't think that's really even important. Now for example, the *Possum Opossum* film (Greg Killmaster). When I saw that film I assumed it was a documentary about possums, about the breeding, and I, my hand to God, I didn't get the tall tale element when I first saw it because I was so taken in by it. I believed everything. I believed it, and they said to me, you mean you really think that they cook possum in battery acid? I said, yes. Of course I also thought there were 52 states in the union. But that was really important, I mean it's important to me that I saw the film that way and that I accepted it that way and that I was then more able to laugh at myself and accept that it was tall tales, and that the whole thing of truth or non-truth was raised.

DAN: Some people get angry when the subject is something more volatile and when they're fooled like that. Some people get downright offended. For example, the film *Not A Love Story*, is supposed to be a document about pornography and it turns out to be a pretty guiltless way for people to go in and see those images. Because now it's enshrined in the name documentary...You're brought in, expectations are that this is going to be clinical; I'm gonna learn something; I'm gonna get insight. And then I found myself being exposed to images that are highly charged, pornographic images. And they had the same impact upon me as they would if I sat in an X-rated, XX-rated theatre in downtown Chicago. And I had some problems with that because I came in expecting something different.

ROBERTA: That's not all that was in the film?

DAN: No, oh, no. There was analysis of the films, and so forth, but the images still had the same impact upon me.

ROBERTA: Writers, I think, have a lot more freedom, as far as what they're permitted to write without necessarily having it be named. Well, maybe it is named, but there are more names.

PETER: They've been around longer.

DAN: More categories..

ROBERTA: Well, okay. Thoreau didn't do a documentary on Walden Pond. You know, I don't even know what it's called -- but reflections, or thoughts, or whatever, and somehow it's not okay for a filmmaker to do thoughts on whatever as a form.

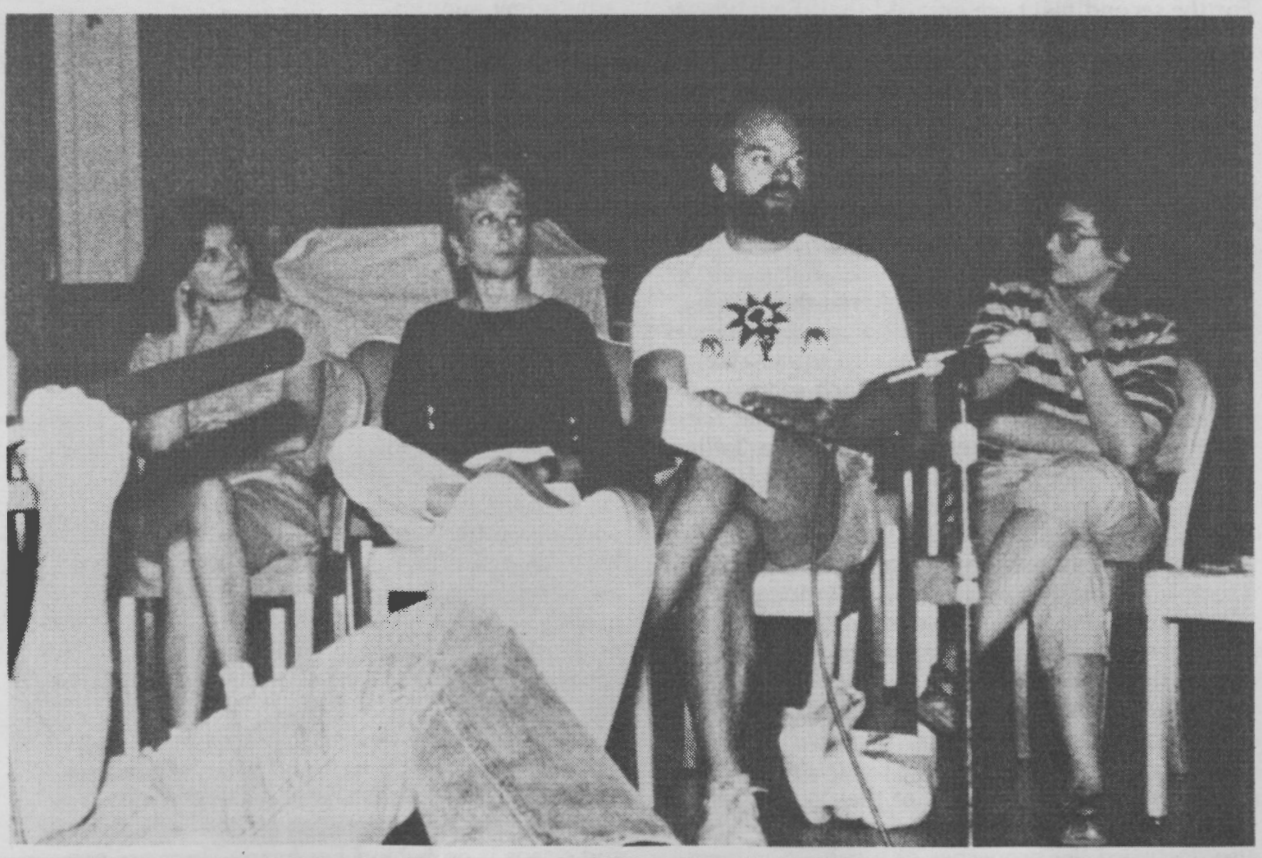
AUDIENCE (MIKE FLEISHMAN): There's a real propensity to name, a need to name things, to order. That really colors a lot of what people are trying to do when they're making films anyway. Which is: they're on a hunt, an investigation, a safari to bring back images. And a lot of times I think that's why people choose other cultures, to know something outside of themselves, to bring back something mysterious, to create sort of an image zoo...It's a conquest, it's sort of a hunt.

PETER: Some of us are pretty visually oriented. And the visual arena world operates in a different way than the oral world. I can't discuss it scientifically, but the world of images for me is a world that I can't put into words. And if I could put it into words, man, I would, because, you know, it's expensive to make films, and it's a pain in the ass, and you're lugging all this equipment. It's a different world. I mean, who wants to go to Peru and spend $10,000. It's a different world. And the world of images comes from somewhere else. And so to try to put English language words on a world of images seems to me absurd. Impossible.

DAN: What do we do when, in other words, you say, "It's art. It's ineffable. You can't talk about it."

PETER: I'm not saying we can't talk about it. I'm just saying that one of the difficulties in this kind of situation is that we're trying to talk about

(continued on page 10)



Left to right: Gayla Jamison, Greer Grant, Charles Lyman, and Roberta Cantow. (photo by Bob Gilbert)

Reviews

Dwelling With the Strong Eye: a performance by Alyson Pou

Lee Sokol

Genesis 11:9 Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all earth.

The magical monument known in the Bible as the Tower of Babel had seven stages, each one dedicated to a planet. Its angles symbolized the four corners of the world and the number four, according to old Sumerian tradition, was the number of the heavens. The four-cornered square or rectangle was accepted by Babylon as the basis of their system. The legend ascribes that the impious were warned against entering the tower and engraved over the entrance were the words "Stay away, keep out from here ye profane." By ascending the seven steps of the tower it was thought that one would attain the knowledge of God, and once at the top be standing at the threshold of God's heavenly dwelling.

— *Magic, Supernatural and Religion*
by Kurt Seligmann

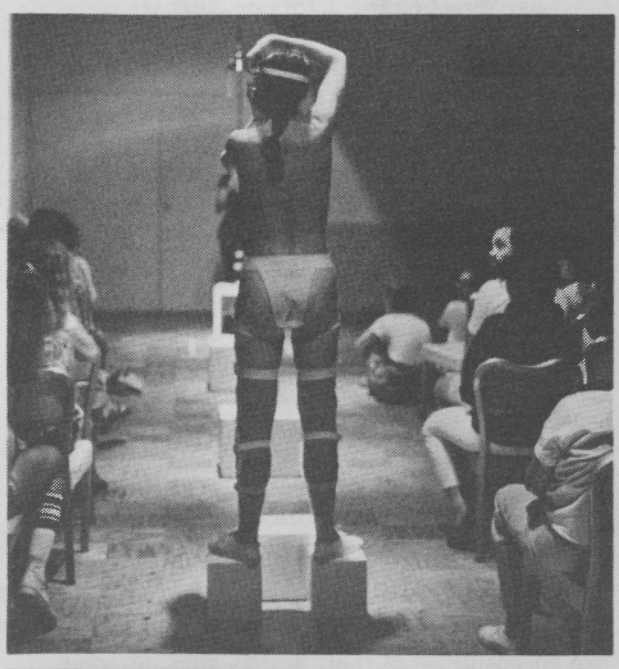
The body is the physical link between ourselves, our souls, and the world outside. Primitive man in his bare, unclothed state lived in a milieu of fears and superstitions borne out of the struggle for survival in a hostile environment. The first body embellishments and rudimentary clothing served as potent weapons against the perils surrounding him, for in early body decoration the function was entirely magical. Through the powers of painted symbols on skin, primitive humans attempted to control the natural and supernatural forces that dominated their lives. As man evolved he continued to order nature and society to explain and control his enlarging world. Sacred spaces were designated, temples were erected and special garments were designed to enhance the earliest human religious rituals, and man's developing sense of himself simultaneously occurred in relation to territory, shelter and clothing.

While the square is the symbol of the forces of the earth, of the body and reality, the circle or sphere expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects. However it has appeared in myths, dreams, primitive and modern religion, even in the ground plans of cities, it always refers to the ultimate wholeness of life. The circle forms the foundation both in secular and sacred buildings in nearly all civilizations and venerates the sacred place bound by its center to the spiritual world. These circular structures are symbols that induce a distinctive impact on the human being who enters or lives there. Both the circle and the square have appeared together with enormous frequency from prehistoric to modern times as the archetypal image of the mysteries of matter in union with the cosmos. From a circular and psychic compass four points of orientation are drawn, and by connecting these points the circle is squared in a perfect marriage of thought and spirit, body and mind.

The square, the circle, fabrication of structures and their relationship to costume and goddess impersonation all figure prominently in Alyson Pou's recent 35-minute performance, *Dwelling With the Strong Eye.* Through the devices of objects, costumes, slides, film and highly formal structuring of action, she creates individually potent and succinct statements.

In the first of the two sections that divide the performance, a series of four nightly dreams and experiences will be depicted. A long stark white wall forms the backdrop to the tableau, and entering from the left wearing black sweatpants, naked from the waist up, Pou immediately begins to physically interact with a series of colored slide projections. She poses beside the edges of blue light, framing it with her arms as she recites a dream story while slowly and meticulously moving down the length of the wall. "The first night, New Moon. I was aware of tossing and turning, my body moving in and out of fantastically impossible configurations..." Each motion she makes corresponds to a spoken line, her voice cool and detached, her movements restless and contorted. For the second night we are told that the moon is full and that she is cold and terrified. Squatting beside a slide of white, knife-like line shapes on a black background, she tells of lying in bed watching the moon create patterns on her wall. These patterns remind her of pictures of a primitive cave dwelling. She rises and a small square of light is projected between her spread legs as she turns and reaches down to place her hand in the center of the square.

On the third night she is hunkered down in front of a white horizontal slide arranging oranges on her right arm, which is extended to her side, forming a shelf against the wall. Each orange corresponds to the distance between the sun, the moon, and the earth. She is wakened by a "falling body," which hits the floor and makes her bed shake. Her arm tilts and the oranges fall to the floor making a dull thud. On the fourth night she is quoting from a text on architecture. "...design of a temple depends on symmetry, the principles of which must be most closely observed - observed as in the perfect measure of the human form...as in its relationship to its members - hand, foot, head..." While she is speaking, she is measuring out lengths of white glow-in-the-dark tape from her nose to the end of her arm, and laying the tape down in a square shape onto the center of the floor. By the time she has finished laying the square, she has also described the properties of a cube. She then sits down in a chair placed behind the square and begins to draw geometric shapes in the air for each spoken line that she recites. "How many dreams start...I was in a room; I was in a house; I was in a corner; I was in a hallway?" For the room she draws a square, for the hallway she slices the air with her two hands parallel. "I see myself walking down a hallway. I see rows of people along the way. This, I think is the foundation."



"When Pou arrives at the first box, she bends down and removes a white plaster mask from the inside of the box and straps it on behind her head." From DWELLING WITH THE STRONG EYE by Alyson Pou. (photo by David Audet)

In a cycle of four vignettes, each one concurring with a single eventful night, she has explored the borders, searched for the center, constructed a framework (using her body for a measuring tool) and defined the properties of the square/rectangle/cube. Her physical interplay along with the narrative, conceptually demonstrates the correlation between the foundations of the body (the "temple of the soul"), and the actual construction of architectural forms. The use of hand language cross-references the parts of a house with bodily enactment, and will be used again in an ensuing scenario, but next time without a spoken counterpart.

The transition from the first section to the second is set by a Super-8 film composed of close-up, grainy and poorly exposed images of a woman's lipsticked mouth drawing short white sticks out from between her lips and attempting to construct rudimentary squares and cubes with them. No sooner is a cube completed, looking unsturdy and crude, than the image cuts, at times to the mouth which continues to produce the sticks, at times to a hand which is hiding a word behind it. The scenes are designed so that we are given just enough time to read the word before the image cuts again; to the mouth, to the hidden words to the hands that build. The three words that are intermittently exposed are "image," "burn," and "mind." The film itself stands out as a visual dissonance to the carefully polished and minimal elements that Pou has employed up to this point, and it extends over an unnecessarily long period of about 7 minutes, feeling predictable and redundant after a few minutes.

The tone set by the film is in graphic contrast to the next sequence. An anonymous woman from the audience sits in the chair center-stage, and in a trance-like, extremely focused state, immediately begins to sign out a story with her hands, looking intensely and silently down the aisle that is in front of her formed by a passageway between the audience. An audio tape is being played of a guttural, incessant chanting, very much like mantras. While she is signing out this cryptic, graceful and hypnotic hand language, Pou has begun her procession down the aisle at the rear of the audience. Unclothed from the waist up, she is wearing a covering of white plaster armor plates strapped onto the lower half of her body that are secured onto a jock-strap looking garment around her hips leaving her buttocks exposed. She is walking on two white cubes that are about 10" high adhered to her feet by white sneakers that are nailed onto the cubes. These dimensions project her already tall stature to towering proportions, and combine with the costume to create an image that is both stunning and horrifying.

A series of three boxes are placed in the aisle, spaced about 4 feet apart, and when she arrives at the first one, Pou bends down and removes a white plaster mask from the inside of the box and straps it on behind her head. There are no eye holes cut in the mask, so once it is on the

rest of the procession is taken step by step in complete blindness. Stepping over the cube which held the mask, she approaches the next box and from this one produces a breastplate. She straps it on and strides on slowly and deliberately to the final box situated about 8 feet in front of the woman in the chair. From this box she removes arm plates that have white gloves dangling lifelessly from the wrists. Striding this final 3-dimensional obstacle she continues to walk toward the mysterious speaker, making a hollow echo with each weighty step. Just as she reaches the glowing square outlined on the floor separating her from the signer, she is loudly commanded to "stop!", and the enigmatic spell cast by the chanting and the performers is abruptly broken.

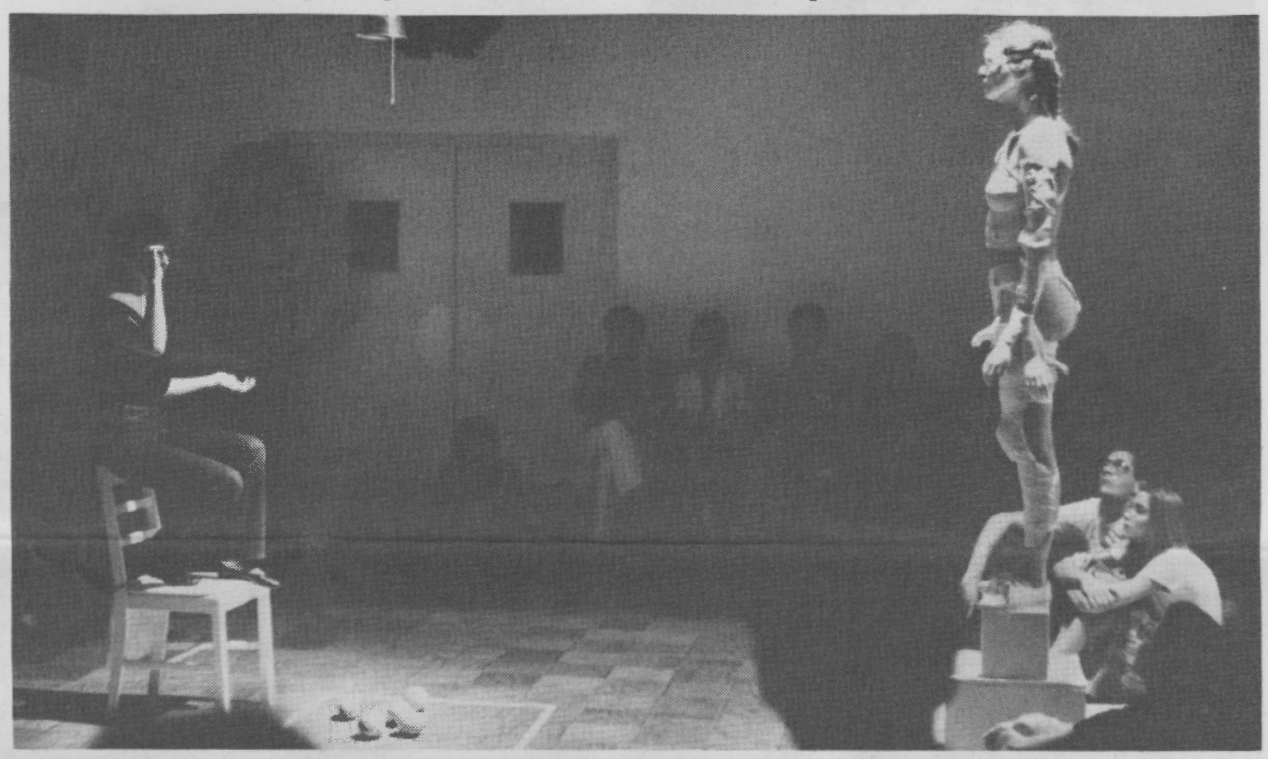
The beauty and precise pacing of the sign language in this scenario enacts a secret code that is incomprehensible but implicitly coherent. The guise of the armor that Pou is encased in acts as a layer obstructing her from this vital clue in her journey, yet however handicapped, she is propelled directly toward the oracle by the visceral chanting, the internal sounds of the mantra. In this coded and camouflaged way she is on a quest to encounter the wisdom and clarity that is articulated in the fingertips of the signer.

The story told in sign language is the biblical passage in the book of Genesis about the Tower of Babel, when the construction of a towering temple was ordered so that the wise man who ascended the seven steps would attain higher and higher degrees of knowledge before he reached the "hidden lights of wisdom" and would "apprehend the sublime and the eternal." Legend tells us that the actual Tower of Babel was never completed and that God's device of confounding communication served to insure the failure of this sinful construction. In Pou's ascent she is building layers onto her body in the same way that a builder would compose a structure by laying bricks, one piece at a time. She, like the impious and profane who have gone before her, is denied access to the gateway to heaven.

The commandment to stop is followed by a blackout, and while Pou, still blindfolded, is being led over to the far left wall, on the right a series of black and white slides are projected of circular, primitive dwellings. Some are of African and Middle Eastern huts, some of aerial views of whole communities structured in a circle, some are of cave dwellings built from rock, clay and mud. While the slides are presented, Pou is being stripped of the armor by the nameless woman. The only sound beside the slide projector is the peeling of the velcro as the cast is removed and fastened to the wall.

The conclusion of the slides and the stripping of the "skin" marks the beginning of the final section of the performance. Pou, fully dressed in black, places some oranges inside the square on the floor. Stooping down, she rolls the oranges out of the borders with the tip of a knife until there is one left, which she picks up and begins to peel in a continuous spiral motion. The skin comes off in one whole piece as the juice from the orange drips from her hands forming a puddle in the square. She removes a yellow satin hoop skirt from a hook on the wall and places it in the square, sitting down cross-legged on top of it, her back to the audience. She is rubbing something onto her face, and then twisting her right arm up to her left shoulderblade she draws a red line down to her waist. Changing hands, shifting from one side to the other she continues to draw blindly on her back until she has completed the contours of a rectangle on her pale skin. She pats something onto her chest, and standing up, she pulls the skirt over her hips and turns to face the audience. Deep red smears beneath her eyes and a strip of sandpaper pasted between her breasts are seen just before she reaches up to turn off the spotlight hanging above her. With a sweeping, upward motion she pulls a matchstick over the sandpaper, holds the flame below her eye before throwing it out to her side. The motion is repeated to the opposite side and the last image that remains before the performance ends is a small flame briefly lighting her reddened eye.

"Pou now stands firmly in the center of her mystical landscape." (photo by David Audet)



"An anonymous woman...signs a story as Pou proceeds down the aisle toward the glowing square outlined on the floor." (photo by David Audet)

The image she projects in the four-tiered, floor-length hoop skirt, exposed breasts with a flat plate adhered between them and alternately outstretched arms is strikingly reminiscent of the familiar Cretan Snake Goddess generally associated with mystic insight and wisdom. Pou denies the relationship, claiming the image she portrays is purely intuitive. C.G. Jung has said that "A true symbol appears when thought cannot think." This is the essence of intuition and Pou's resemblance, in her unconscious emulation of the goddess, effectively serves to gather together the abstractions of this highly conceptual piece and provides a concrete, symbolic ending. The spherical orange has been penetrated, the skin peeled off neatly in a single spiral piece; the juice it contains has been spilled into the square. The square has been encircled by the hoop skirt and finally occupied by Pou. She now stands firmly in the center of her mystical landscape, wearing the four circular layers of the skirt; her round breasts, the red encircling her eyes, the rectangle on her back, and cyclical motion of lighting the fire, crystalize the inner forces of the circle and the square she embodies.

Pou borrows from comprehensive and well-established precedents in performance art. The technical elements of slides, film, audio tape and objects, as well as the formal elements of costume, marking of space, nudity, precise dance-like motion, ritual, legend, and dream stories are all conventions in performance tradition. Even the issues she addresses concerning body, space, architecture and costume have all been extensively examined in the past in live performance art. The legacy endowed by the genre encompasses performances dating as far back as the 1910's and '20's relating the symmetry of the body to architectural forms. The Futurists, the Dadaists, the Surrealists, and the Bauhaus all experimented with the unification of architecture, space, and the human form, implementing costumes and motion to depict these relationships. Pou's work is closely derived from and profoundly influenced by the work of Theodora Skipetares (after whom she models herself), and the work of Mary Beth Edelson. The similarity in the case of Skipetares' approach to performance is apparent in almost every aspect of the staging, but while Theodora tells direct and linear stories about herself and specific people, Pou is calculated in her indirectness. The formal, theatrical elements, down to an almost exact replication in appearance, presence, format, constructed objects, the depiction of legends and the use of wallspace as a point of interaction is strikingly evident. However, Pou is more concerned with the abstract conveyance of ideas while Skipetares is involved with concise and personal communication, and although the similarities are profuse, Pou's interest in the spiritual is more aligned with that of Mary Beth Edelson's, who is in great part responsible for popularizing the use of goddess ritual and imagery in performance art. Both Edelson's and Pou's work are parallel in mystique and the consecration of performance space.

The recent extravaganzas of Laurie Anderson and Robert Wilson, which have gained spectacular acclaim, integrate the components of concert, theatre and performance innovations in epic-length productions requiring extensive technical staging and collaboration. Pou's stylization of minimal performance art represents a combination of trends that seem to not know where to go. Although Pou's dynamics as a performer are compelling and great, the form she chooses becomes a cliche' in the light of feminist performances of the Seventies. She is an exceptionally gifted performer to watch closely to see what she might originate out of the influences she adopts.

Exhibition

Animator Co Hoedeman To Tour The Southern Circuit

A magical rabbit etched into black acetate is one of the vanishing characters in Viviane Elne'cave' 's LUNA LUNA LUNA.

Jan Millsapps

Since its founding in 1941, the animation division of the National Film Board of Canada has been busy pioneering unusual styles of animation. Norman McLaren's optical step-printing in *Pas de Deux* (1965) and his *Neighbors* (1952) pixillation are two classic examples.

In recent years, a new generation of animators have added more awards and notoriety to the Film Board's already international reputation. Caroline Leaf's paint-on-glass animation, *The Street*, received an Academy Award nomination, along with numerous other prizes, and Co Hoedeman's puppet animation, *Sand Castle*, won an Oscar in 1978.

This October, Hoedeman will tour the Southeast as part of the Southern Circuit with outstanding examples of recent Film Board animation. All films in this program (with the exception of Hoedeman's) were created by women, who now make up 25 percent of the full time animation staff.

Caroline Leaf's 1977 film, *The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa*, interprets a Franz Kafka story about a man who wakes up as a cockroach. The brand new man-sized roach suffers all the indignities of his situation, including being repulsive to all his acquaintances and getting stuck on his back with all six legs flailing in the air.

The film was a three-year project done in the sand animation technique Leaf had used in several previous works, including her Eskimo legend film, *The Owl Who Married the Goose*. Fine beach sand is placed on glass, underlit, and manipulated directly under the camera with small brushes, sticks, straws or fingers. Because the scale is not large -- about 8x10 -- only essential details are shown.

This animation is much freer than the finely detailed work Leaf did in *The Street*, where we can see a fly crawling around a lampshade in a long shot. In the *Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa*, the insect looms front and center, filling the frame (even though Kafka in 1915 had warned an illustrator that his cockroach should never be visually depicted). The roach's awkard movements take precedence over subtleties like facial expressions and wallpaper patterns, providing the film with an abstract and rather primitive quality which enhances its subject matter. In addition, the textures of the sand arranged with different instruments give the film depth and a dark, brooding expressionistic quality rare in Film Board products, which generally remain in the upbeat range.

Another innovative technique was developed by animator Viviane Elne'cave' for her 1982 *Luna, Luna, Luna*, a film about nighttime mysteries. Elne'cave', working for the first time in an experimental technique, scratched directly onto pieces of black acetate under the camera with illumination from underneath, which highlights the scratched-out areas with an effect akin to fine-lined etchings.

Luna, Luna, Luna is a film of nuances. All its imagery flashes out of and back into the blackness, which seems deep and thick. We get glimpses of forest creatures and a young girl, perhaps sleep-walking, perhaps dreaming. Characters are only identified partially, with a wide pair of eyes, a paw, or a fin. Images fade in and out quickly, as if passing through a shaft of moonlight, or they dissolve rapidly into similar drawings with a kind of delayed reaction, strobing effect. The minimalism of the pictures, together with a full suggestive soundtrack of chirps, splashes and rustles evokes a mood much more mysterious than more explicit artwork would have allowed. A native Canadian Indian song, *"Shibi,"* introduces the film.

Gradually the nighttime happenings become more fantastic -- running trees, a howling monster, and some familiar figures, such as a rabbit magician and a disappearing cat with lingering eyes, reminiscent of the charming madness in Alice's Wonderland. Over it all reigns the full moon, assumed to be responsible for this lunacy.

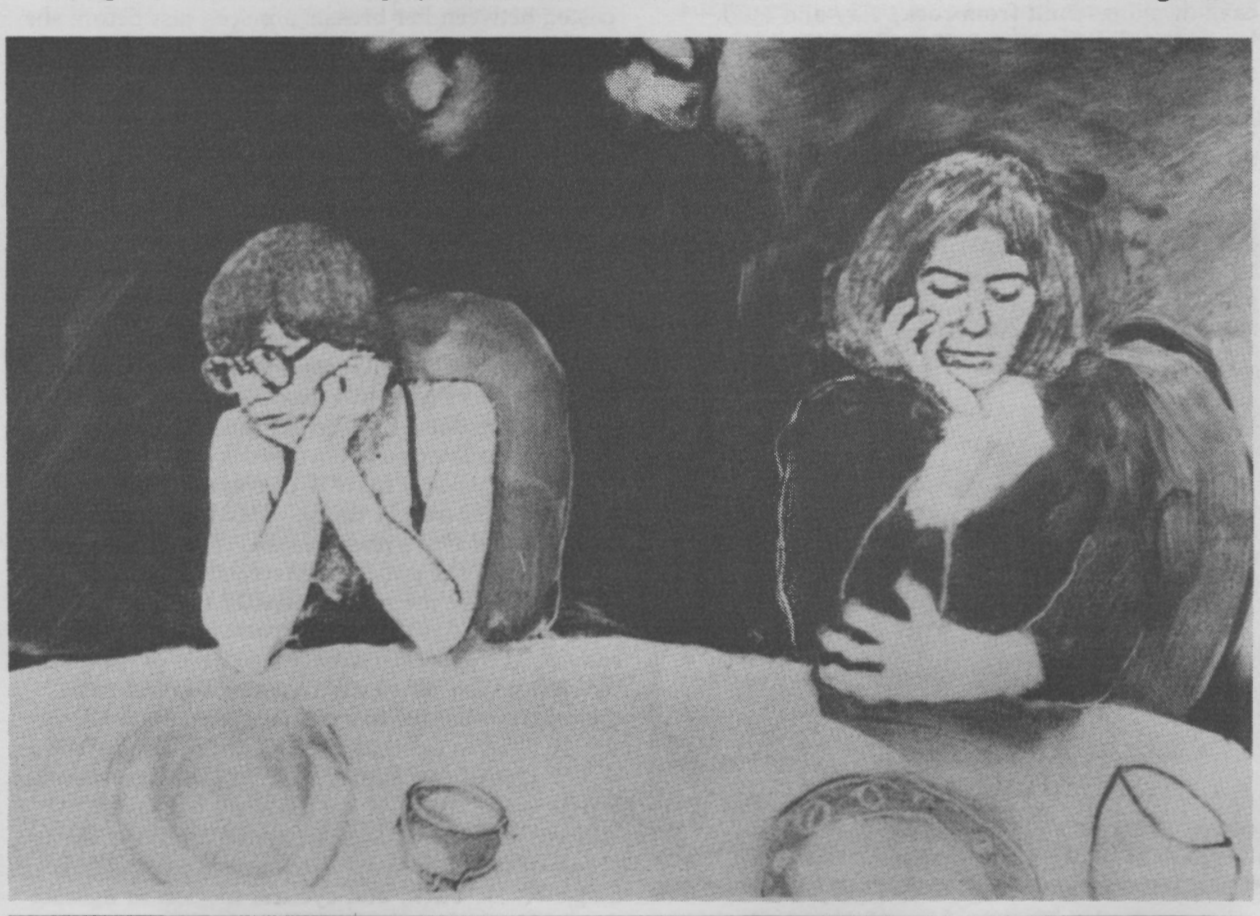
La Plage by Suzanne Gervais plays in a similar way with the boundaries between fantasy and reality, this time, however, as an adult experience. This animation, done with black-and-white pencil drawings, is based on a story by Canadian writer Rock Carrier, and concerns a minor incident on a beach which is given poetic proportions by Gervais' superb drawing style.

Three men preoccupied in a chess game on the shore fail to notice a woman capsizing in a sailboat on the rough ocean. The woman turns up swimming in one man's drinking glass, though Gervais' drawing never allows us to be certain whether the event is real or imagined. We see a hand swimming in the glass, attached to the drowning woman, then later, the same hand appears only to belong to one of the chess players, seen and magnified through the clear glass. We jump repeatedly from inside the glass to the same events on an open sea, and the sun, drawn with long penetrating rays, interrupts the man's gaze from time to time. Gervais' timing, her juxtaposition of images, and carefully arranged repetitions with slight variations all contribute to the uncertainty of what is really happening.

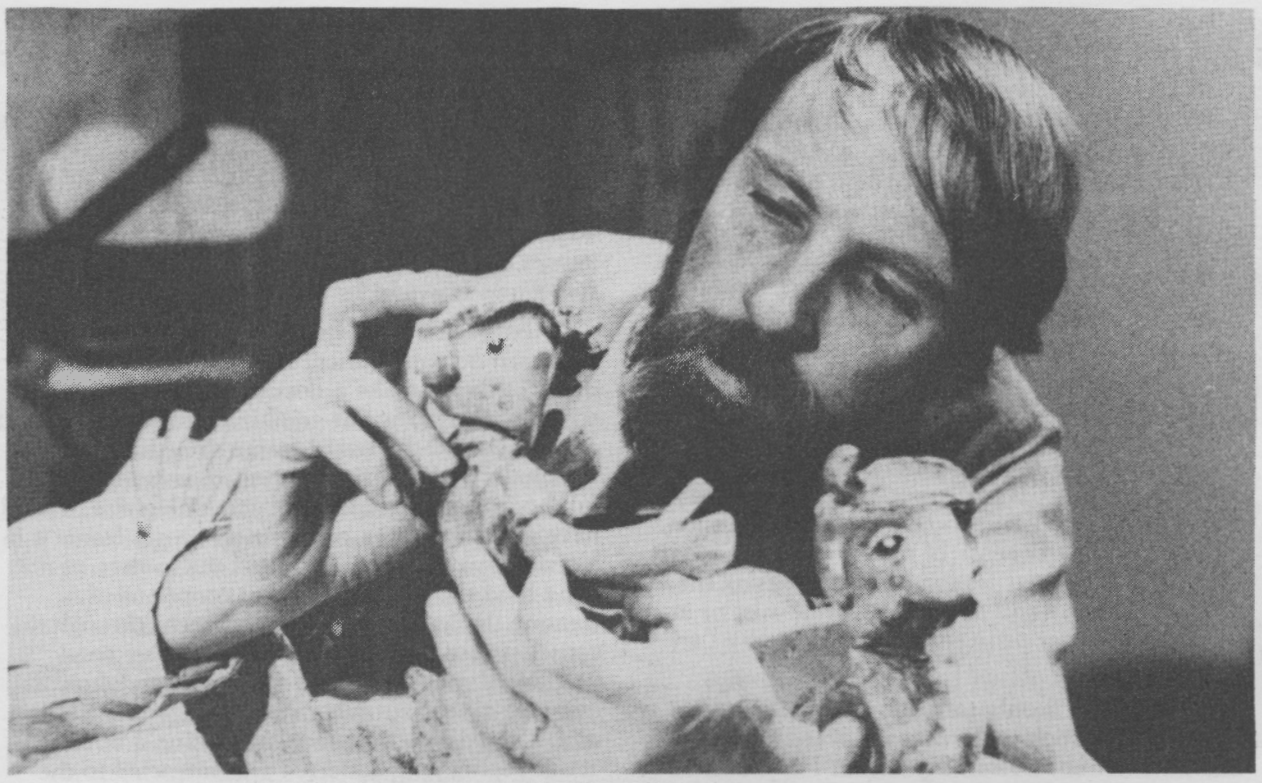
Other works by Gervais include *Cycles* (ink on paper), *Climates* (ink and watercolor with backlighting), and the in-progress *Solitude* (cutouts with under-camera and side lighting).

Lynn Smith, who developed a method of animating pastel drawings under the camera in *Why a Museum?*, recently completed another film with an unusual style, *The Sound Collector*. Designed primarily for children, the film features a boy who collects sounds by identifying them and fantasizing about them, much to the chagrin of his older, more earth-bound brother.

To create her cast of characters, the boy and his family, Smith combined different cut-out elements, such as noses, eyes, and mouths, in different positions on a neutral "face" background. The effect is odd -- because the facial features are being con-



INTERVIEW by Veronika Soul and Caroline Leaf is a film by and about the two animator friends.



Animator Co Hoedeman with his puppets from LA FETE/CELEBRATION, his most recent production.

stantly revised and replaced; the structure of each face seems disproportionate and at times gelatinous. We can never be sure exactly what each face is like, because it keeps changing. The sets are likewise cut-out, and the entire film offers proof that Smith herself is also a collector of cut-outs.

Interview is a double self-portrait film mixing the styles of two animators, Caroline Leaf and Veronika Soul. Leaf's paint-on-glass techniques and Soul's cut-outs and collages are used in combination to explore the personalities of each animator and their friendship.

Co Hoedeman, a Dutch-born animator who joined the Film Board in 1965, will present three of his films, including the multi-award winning *Sand Castle*.

Hoedeman works three-dimensionally, with miniature sets and puppets made of foam rubber and wire foundations, rather than with more traditional flat artwork, and learned his techniques from Czechoslovakian puppet animators. His films are mostly fantasies, and he makes the characters and settings fit neatly together; they are often created of the same substance, such as sand creatures in a sand landscape, as in *Sand Castle*, or block figures, made by co-worker Suzanne Gervais, in a building block environment in his film *Tchou-Tchou*. He often choreographs multiple movements of figures and camera in his head, and works alone or with one or two assistants.

Unlike most animators who shoot in "twos," or two frames for each change in the movement, Hoedeman works in "ones;" he shoots a single frame, then re-positions or changes the scene, shoots another single frame, and so on.

In addition to *Sand Castle* and *Tchou-Tchou*, Hoedeman will also premiere a new film in the Southeast, *La Fete*, completed during the past three years from his original script. *La Fete* features children and adult papier-mache' puppets who live in an imaginary world where they are celebrating harvest time with a variety of activities, including a masquerade.

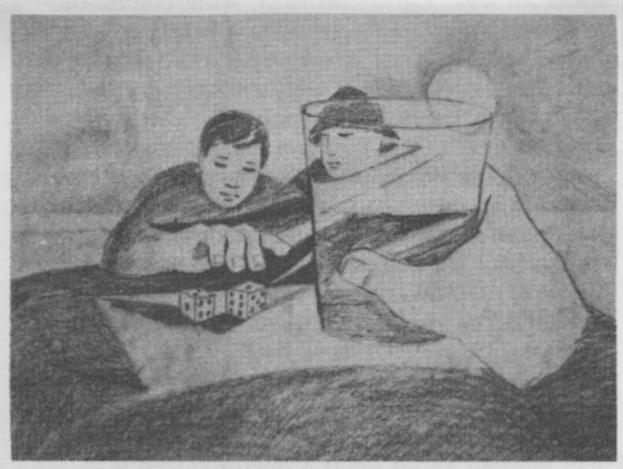
For the film, Hoedeman created an entire village and environs, with streets, houses and mountain ranges. The set is contained on a tabletop, about the same scale as the sandbox he designed for filming *Sand Castle*. Each character was individually designed, along with elaborate masquerade costumes, such as a tissue paper dragon.

While the film, just completed, will be presented in a French version, Hoedeman says that the meaning is not dependent on the dialogue. Like most Film Board films, *La Fete* was designed for an international audience. Eventually there will be an English version, a standard practice for the bilingual Film Board.

Hoedeman will visit six Southern cities with the above collection of films.

For further information contact the specific site or the South Carolina Arts Commission Media Arts Center, 803/758-7942.

Lynn Smith's recent cut-out animation, THE SOUND COLLECTOR, employs a surrealistic collage style.



Suzanne Gervais' LA PLAGE is based on a haunting story by Canadian writer Rock Carrier.

Oct. 17 – Southwestern at Memphis, Memphis, TN. 901/274-1800 ext. 347.

Oct. 18 – College of Charleston, Charleston, SC. 803/792-5726.

Oct. 19 – Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, LA. 504/523-1216.

Oct. 20 – Georgia State University, IMAGE Film/Video Center, Atlanta, GA. 404/874-4756.

Oct. 22 – Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL. 205/254-2571.

Oct. 23 – University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC. 803/777-6812.

The Southern Circuit is a program of the South Carolina Arts Commission; the National Endowment for the Arts; local sponsors; the National Film Board of Canada; and the Canadian Consulates General, Atlanta and New Orleans.

Resources

The International Festival Of New Cinema (Montreal) provides a progressive alternative for American, Canadian, and European independents. Artists represented in 1982 included Peter Rose, Chantel Ackerman, Robert Young, Emile De Antonio, and Fred Wiseman. Festival co-director Dimitri Epides travels to NYC in Aug. or Sept. scouting shorts, features, video, and documentaries for the Nov. 4-13 festival. Contact him at: Cinema Parallele, 3684 Boulevard Saint-Laurent, Montreal, Quebec H2X 2V4 Canada. 514/843-4725/4711.

Open Solicitation Guidelines for the FY84 Corporation for Public Broadcasting Program Fund are available for deadlines of Dec. 16, 1983 and April 20, 1984. Independent producers and public television stations may submit proposals for development and production of programs for PTV in one of two areas: news and public affairs, or cultural and general. Selection criteria include: relevance to a national audience, credentials of production team, adherence to accepted technical, ethical, artistic and journalistic standards. Works not appropriate for submission include student films, industrials, personality profiles, international cultural documentaries. Time-sensitive issues will be processed individually. Standard broadcast program length is required, and there is no restriction on amount requested. Matching sources are encouraged. For applications and information contact: Don Marbury, Associate Director for Cultural and General Programs, or John Wicklein, Associate Director for News and Public Affairs, Program Fund, CPB, 1111 Sixteenth St. N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

Film/Video Music Composer specializing in electronic music, sound effects, orchestration. Original composing and music library. Experience with independents, PBS, HBO. Contact: Jack Tamul, PO Box 121264, Nashville, TN 37212. 615/292-0922.

Group Equipment Insurance is being offered by AIVF (Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers) to its members. The policy covers all risk for physical loss or damage with customary exclusions, has a $250 deductible, and an annual premium of $1.75 per $100 insured value. For application form or information contact: Jay Levy, Amalgamated Programs Corp., 161 William St., NY, NY 10038. For AIVF membership information contact: AIVF, 625 Broadway, 9th Floor, NY, NY 10012. 212/473-3400.

The Museum Of Modern Art's Cineprobe series offers screenings of independent work for an honoraria. Contact: Larry Kardish, MOMA, 11 W. 53rd St., NY, NY 10019. 212/956-7514.

Documentary Film

(continued from page 5)

something that's working with multiple languages and we have a language that evades precisely what we're trying to talk about. It evades, it's very elusive, it goes around corners.

AUDIENCE (RON BRITT): Talking about documentaries in a definitionary type sense, even the most non-fictional of novels wouldn't qualify as a documentary. A documentary might fall under the heading of a clinical report, and if the audience is expected to look at a documentary film like you read a clinical laboratory report, it makes awfully dry reading just like it would make awfully dry viewing. I believe personally that you can never detach yourself wholly from either the truth or the reality of the situation. As a cinematographer you always become involved in your subject matter on one level or another. And so if you accept the fact, then the true documentary, if you want to say documentary as a clinical report, does not exist. And if it does, nobody wants to see it.

NANCY: I think maybe another way to get at it is to look at why we do it. Because if you come to a subject for different reasons, that will change the treatment of it. For me, it seems that to make a document is really a question of sharing something, and it's perceived that way by me when I see your film, Les. I see someone who thought that this was really interesting and wanted to share it with a lot of people. So, maybe it's something that you see that you want to share with a lot of people, or maybe it's something that you feel that you think you'd like to share and see if that's going to relate. I think that the motive is real important.

AUDIENCE: I'm basically a painter and I paint in all kinds of mediums and to me when I think about an idea, I grab airbrush, watercolors, oil, whatever I need to do my idea...As a very novice filmmaker, I'm more interested in not whether or not something's really a documentary, but I'd rather know from these people why they have chosen to grab their medium and do the things that they've done. Why, when you were doing the poet, would you choose to interpret the poet and his poetry rather than maybe just do a frontal, straightforward image. I would like to hear a little bit of that from each of you if that wouldn't take us way off onto another track. But to me that's very vital because I'm sure that as many of you as there are, you all have your own individual way of working and I'd like to know more about how you approach working on an individual basis rather than arguing about what a documentary is.

SUSAN: I think that would be a good place to finish up by hearing your individual responses.

GAYLA: I've been thinking that through all of this, all filmmaking is telling a story. And it just depends on how you choose to tell your story and which one you're telling. When I was dealing with Koinonia, I felt some frustration that I wasn't able to re-create some events from the past that I thought were probably more dramatic than anything I could show on camera happening now. And there were times when I really wanted to be working on what's called a docu-drama. I wanted to be re-creating with actors and a script what had happened as a way of telling a story. I didn't feel capable of doing that and I was just as interested in documenting or telling my experience of Koinonia through images of the people now. So that's just the way I chose to tell my story.

GREER: I had never thought about making a documentary film before I made this one. I was involved with the poem on which the film is based, the poem called "Foam on Gulf Shores"...And there was some difference between reading the poem for myself and the poet reading it. And that's still one problem I have that never merged for me. Because it's an entirely different experience, and I wanted to give the audience the experience of reading it and all the mental images that reading the poem conjured up. So I thought that I could blend the two things and that's what I was attempting to do.

CHARLES: I saw a documentary once where somebody was interviewing a patient, a terminal patient in a cancer hospital, and they asked the patient what they would do differently if they had their life to do over. And the patient said something equivalent to "Take more chances" or "Make more mistakes." And I think documentary is a really personal thing for me, or being involved in that kind of thing is really personal. I get myself in the position where somehow there's more tension, more drama, more sense of metaphor about what life is like. It's a process for me of increasing the taste of existence and then sharing that sort of intensity with other people. I think that's why I try it.

ROBERTA: I'll only talk about one film, *Clotheslines* which is the one you'll see later this afternoon. And all I can say is that I approached that specifically from the point of view of the image. I was obsessed with a particular image and I had no idea that I was making a documentary film in any sense of the word when I started to make the film. I was just obsessed with the image and the more I shot the image, the more I felt like I was getting inside the image and inside meanings embodied in the image.

LES: I like a lot of what other people here have said. The idea of sharing something you've found is like when you're a little kid and find a seashell you like, you run up and down the street saying, "Look what I've found." That's a basis of it. Film also allows you to combine all of the possible media in one element. Art, music, dance, nature, anything you feel like looking at and liking or listening to, you can put into a film. Another reason is it gives you an excuse to burn a little brighter, live a little harder, by going out into different people's cultures and seeing how they operate and try and hold up a mirror to yourself in relation to them and see what human beings are all about, what life is like, what are the possibilities...Another thing is preserving what's here right now for people in the future. I'd like to look back 200 years ago, 300 years, and see what Shakespeare looked like when he was having a beer. It's all of that.

NANCY: For me it was a sense that I make films about whatever I run into. I have been making short films with material that I found, things that were shot as home movies, my dog, you know, whatever. I'll put those together in some kind of aesthetic soup and try and fish out of it the things that I find interesting and put them together...I found that after I moved away from my home town, that I would tell stories about it and people were interested. And it seemed like no one had paid attention to this area near the space program launching site on Cape Kennedy. No one had paid attention to the people that surrounded the program. There were many films about Saturn and Gemini and Mercury and all of that and they sort of forgot that people made those things and put them up and what it must have been like in the late '50's to put 7,000 engineers and their families in a place where there wasn't anyone before, relatively. And what that did to a culture and what kind of an effect that had on children growing up there, what a strange place that was. So I thought, well, how do I do that? And I began to talk to people who were articulate and interesting and had something to share about it and really just amass material. And then later with Nan Robinson, my co-editor, put it together with a first-person storytelling narration. It's non-fiction, but I don't know what kind of document it is. So those are my motives and my approach.

PETER: I guess part of me's an introvert and part of me's an extrovert and in making films I get a little of both. I go out and collect and then I go hide away and make my own world. What else? It's an addiction. And I love sounds and images. I love images and I love sounds and it's an addiction and sometimes it would be nice to drop the habit.

DAN: I think your question was "How do you approach documentaries? How do you make them?" When I make a documentary I'm real conscious of the particular combination between sound and image and the way I frame something, and if the film is going to be interpreted as being a truthful, honest representation of something else. Then I have to frame it in a certain way or not frame it in a certain way, either hand hold the camera or not hand hold the camera. I'm real conscious of creating the impression of a document through the conscious use of certain cinematographic conventions. I made a film about a woman who was dying of cancer but who was an extremely vocal, articulate person, and she was writing a book about coping with cancer. I was attracted to the person and the idea of making the film because of the persona she had, not so much because of the issue. The issue was ultimately maybe too topical. What the film ultimately is about is how this person presents herself in a public image that fractures here and there. What I mean by that is during an interview she slips and asks me to cut that piece out, or she loses her place or because she was ill she'll say, "I don't feel good today. Would you cut that?" And I didn't. I was very interested in leaving it in. I thought by leaving it in, it said something about the validity of the film to begin with. If I had cut it out, it would have been something else. So I'm real conscious of giving proof to an audience and then, I guess I'll take that back. I'm real conscious of giving an audience a way of measuring my film's credibility if I'm making a document.

TONY: Well, for me, this whole thing's just sort of accidental. I didn't start college until I was about 24 so I'd worked for a long time. I decided to go to graduate school with no intentions about film. I was going to get my masters in psych but I got accepted to the Ohio University Film Department and the only reason is because of my last name. This guy, Joe Anderson, at the time accepted everybody into the department by their last name. He accepted Kathy Kodak, Tommy Tuttle, Tommy Tucker, and Tony Buba because he just wanted to see what these people looked like. And that was it. I went down there and I had no film background, I had no art background. I had no idea of what to even do films on. And I happened to go home. One weekend I returned to my grandfather's shoemaker shop so I just did that. And it might've been just a matter of positive reinforcement, so I just kept on going back and doing more. So now it's just become an obsession with me to keep doing them. And also it's your own ego there in terms of being down here's (Chinsegut) a lot better than working. I mean, no doubt about it...you put yourself out...you're just bullshitting if you don't think that this is an easy life in comparison with going to the mill everyday or going to the factory everyday. And just living that way you get to meet a lot of people. You just enjoy it. I never really get that theoretical. I don't think of all these different things that people talk about. It's sort of interesting. Now, I just like showing the films and seeing what the audience reaction is because if I'm laughing while I'm filming something, I try to keep it in the film. If I feel sad while I'm filming, I try to keep it in the film. So I just deal with things in that way.

SUSAN: I want to thank everyone on the panel and the audience, too. And I'm just glad that we have a document of this discussion.

Comments

Works In Progress

Pam Leonte

Jan Millsapps (Columbia, SC) "It's time to put my footage where my mouth is." Jan is now working on a film entitled *True Romance.* In the film seemingly disparate images from comic books, dreams, and fantasies are structured into a narrative collage with particular emphasis on transitions. Jan's films tend to be autobiographical. In *True Romance*, she disguises herself as the comic book heroine. Her motivation comes from her own experiences and the universal experience of women being constantly deluded by romantic expectations. "This does not exclude men, but women have been brought up with it." The combination of animation and live-action gives her the ability to move from the real world to a world that is constructed. "The animation represents the myths versus the reality which becomes the disillusionment." Jan has 10 minutes completed on the 25 minute film.

(photo by Jeanette Wheeler)

I dreamed I was a white marble statue, standing alone in an empty landscape. A man appeared far away, then began walking slowly toward me. I, of course, remained motionless. Only my eyes moved to follow his progress. He walked right up to me and stood looking at my face for a moment. Then his hand reached up and gently touched my cheek. I could feel how my face must feel to his hand — cool, hard, inhuman. Then he withdrew his hand and left. As he was extremely handsome, I regretted that I could not respond to his touch, and instead had to remain alone and silent on my pedestal. — Jan Millsapps

Paty Bustamante (Columbia, SC) Paty is a native Chilean who has been in the United States for the past seven years and is currently working on her thesis project in Media Arts at the University of South Carolina. Her film, *Slow Roads*, integrates film techniques while maintaining the Chilean/American imagery and music influential to her films.

Slow Roads is a mixture of live-action and animated sequences that alternate between black and white and color passages. The film begins with a man walking along a city street. He journeys from the city to the desert and into fantasy; his image metamorphoses into animated images that are xeroxed and hand-colored. A background of houses shot in live-action transforms into a drawing. Then the man is pixillated against a background of mural people taken from black and white photographs. Live-action shots of him in the desert are transformed by hand-coloring the individual frames. The soundtrack is the Andean music of northern Chile using the Quena flute and Charango (a small guitar-like instrument); the sound is melancholy like the desert. From the desert, he flies into space and disappears then reappears, in the core sequence of the film, as a Chilean Indian. The journey ends as the man returns to the desert and then to the city street. The 16mm film will be approximately 5 minutes in length.

Slow Roads is a continuing exploration and expansion of film techniques that Paty has used in earlier films to translate ideas based on her fine arts background. Earlier films such as *Azul* animate abstract drawings and experiment with underlighting layers of acetate covered with liquid colors; the soundtrack includes experimental sound effects and Samba music. Her first film, *Tango,* is charming in its simplicity. Paty focused on the movement of the Tango dancers by drawing a dance cycle on a series of index cards. She then animated the repeated movement and juxtaposed the sound of an old, scratchy recording of the Tango music. Her films are available through the Media Arts Department/University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208, 803/777-6812.

Thomas Burch Whiteside (Moncure, NC) Tom is currently working on a film with a working title, *The Ben Burch Fishing Film.* "The film will be in 16mm, B/W, silent, using the optical printer to revive some old camera-original 16mm footage that my mother gave me about my grandfather Ben Burch and one of his dogs." The footage was shot over 40 years ago in and around Roanoke, Virginia by a newspaperman doing a story about Tom's grandfather fishing with his dog. Instead of his grandfather using a net to bring in his fish, he trained his dog to "point" fish and then, once the fish were hooked on the line, to jump in the water and retrieve them. "This footage is the motivation to make a good family home movie. The print is in pretty bad shape with a lot of jump cuts and no close-ups. I want to make it smoother. This is my least experimental work...I'm excited...he taught me how to fish..."

Tom recently completed a 3-½m, 16mm film titled *Full Frame Two* with a sound track composed by Dixon Crumpler. All of Tom's work is available through Canyon Cinema in San Francisco and Film-makers' Co-op in New York. (Film-makers' Co-op is publishing a new catalogue supplement, available this Fall.)

Will Hindle (Tampa, FL) Will has nearly completed shooting and is looking forward to rotoscoping. His post-production work will be done in his studio in the Appalachian Mountains of Alabama. The only trips forseen will be to Tennessee to communicate with his lab. Otherwise, Hindle is going to isolate himself to complete his new work, his third film made in the South.

"My life experiences have important input into the films I make." He considers all of his films to be personal and a few to be autobiographical. Will does not work with a script or any type of structure. He composes on an emotional level at the moment of what he feels will work. His film in progress, yet untitled, will be in 16mm, and from 10-30 minutes in length. "The film so far has about 75 people in it. Since I have a little shooting left and my mother is visiting me, there is a good possibility that she may be in it also."

Will and other filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage and James Broughton represent the Personal Film Movement of the 50's. His films have won first prize awards at the Oberhausen International Film Festival, San Francisco International Film Festival, and Ann Arbor Film Festival. He has been awarded grants from the American Film Institute and the Guggenheim Foundation. Will's most recent film, *Pasteur³*, was shot in Florida. He describes the film as, "What occurs to a bodily system following exposure to rabies and goldenrod." His films are distributed by the Museum of Modern Art and Canyon Cinema.

Positions Available At The Virginia Museum

The Virginia Museum has announced two media positions available with *Illusions: Art and the Moving Image*, an innovative educational program that has been developed to extend the successful Artmobile programming into the realm of media arts - television and film. This program, composed of the mobile gallery/tv studio and nine community outreach components, will sharpen the public's awareness of the seeing process as it relates to television and to art.

Available positions are for Video Artist in Residence and Artmobile Curator. Applications must be received as soon as possible by The Virginia Museum, Personnel Department, Boulevard and Grove Avenue, Richmond, VA 23221.

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